**Disclaimer**
This syllabus is to be used as a guideline only. The information provided is a summary of topics to be covered in the class. Information contained in this document such as assignments, grading scales, due dates, office hours, required books and materials may be from a previous semester and are subject to change. Please refer to your instructor for the most recent version of the syllabus.

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**SCHOOL OF**
**Historical, Philosophical**
**& Religious Studies**
**ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY**

REL 202
Popular Culture & Religion
Spring 2022

**Instructor:** Miguel Aguilera, PhD
Office: Coor #4444
Office Hours: T & TH 4:30-6:00 pm
E-mail: miguel.aguilera@asu.edu

Day / Time: T & TH 12:00-1:15 pm
Location: CDN 68
Schedule Line Number: 13702

**General Studies:** HU & C

**Knowledge & Skills Goals:** K1, K2, K3 & S1, S2, S3

**Distribution Area:** United States

**General Studies Information:** Final letter grades for the course will depend upon attendance, reading the required materials, and taking four exams. **Do Not take this class if you do not read course materials as this behavior will severely impact your test scores and, therefore, final course letter grade.** Study guides will be verbally presented in class within the reading assignment lecture discussion. Read the following for detailed course procedures and regulations.

**Required Materials:** I have assigned four inexpensive books, per the below in their required order, that are available at ASU’s University Bookstore and—sometimes cheaper—at online sites such as Amazon, eCampus, Campusbooks, Alibris, etc. Note the specific ISBN # for each assigned book and shop around for the best bargain. **Do not order digital books** as electronic devices are not to be used during class and you would, therefore, have trouble following assignments and content discussion during class lecture. Any PDF documents, if applicable per the syllabus, will be uploaded onto Canvas and/or handed out in class.


Course Description: This course assesses the analytic approaches applied in the interpretation of the various intersects between religion and popular media that includes music, news, advertising, comic books, novels, computer games, television, film, and the use of celebrity. Popular culture offers insights into our history, religion, ethnic diversity, cultural make-up, and socio-economic relations. The study of popular culture is an interdisciplinary approach aimed at comprehending how culture links the individual and society. As an introduction to critical issues and approaches in the study of United States society, we will explore the ways in which each of us is both a user of and is used by popular culture. The course will emphasize popular culture as “contested terrain” where social classes, ethnic groups, women and men, and the powerful and less powerful seek to control images and themes. Popular culture is all around us, influencing how we think, how we feel, how we view the world, and how we live our lives. In particular, this course will use your own expertise as consumer as a foundation for exploring the various roles played by mass-mediated popular culture in our lives.

Course Goals: The first goal of the course is to attain a basic understanding of the media milestones in popular culture. The second goal is a critical investigation into the influence of popular culture and the political implications that are entailed in social trends and how these may be integrated into novel cultural practices and new religious movements. Within both goals, historical analysis will be emphasized in order to recognize and understand how popular culture dimensions change over time, including what accounts for the changes, and how current popular culture differs from that of ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. Fulfilling the previous two goals will be accomplished through completing assigned readings, attending lecture, and participating in class discussions. Achieving these two goals will enable students to see everyday life with new eyes by teaching them critical thinking and inquiry into what is otherwise taken for granted. The combined fields of knowledge in this course from religious studies, anthropology, philosophy, and history will give the student a well-rounded theoretical base upon which to study religion and culture by evaluating the complexity of, through the identifying of logic problems and the pinpointing of contradictions, within human discourse and behavior.

Learning Outcomes, Transferrable Skills, and Career Competencies: The student will gain a critical evaluation to studying popular culture through a variety of analytical approaches. Techniques employed will be analytical discussions of the assigned readings as focused on these three dimensions: 1) Production Analysis (who creates and programs the various media and to what end? how much is driven by profit compared to individual creative expression? how democratic or elitist is the production of popular culture?); 2) Textual Analysis (how do specific works of popular culture get their meanings across? how do explicit meanings differ from implied ones? how do these works consciously and/or subconsciously shape those exposed to them?); 3) Audience Analysis (how do different popular culture consumers make similar or different senses of the same works?). Practical skills, attained in this classroom, are not only valued by BA/MA/PhD programs but many potential non-academic employers and, therefore, of benefit beyond this course. These skills are achieved through competencies in critical thinking; problem solving; humane professional ethics; world citizen intercultural collaboration; and leadership focused on an empathetic articulation of oral, and/or written, communication based on facts rather than emotions.

Assignments: Each class meeting requires the student to have read an average of 35-40 pages per ½ hour lecture period as stipulated in the below reading schedule. The timely completion of assigned readings is crucial to the final course grade achieved, per the following, and the student learning outcomes stipulated above.

Canvas Materials: PDFs not handed out in class should be printed out by the student from Canvas and brought to their assigned lecture since open computers are not allowed in class.

Tech Support: Students can obtain IT support by visiting the “Service” tab in MyASU or visiting https://myasu.force.com/. Canvas support can be obtained by calling 1-855-278-5080.

Course Materials and Adult Content: Course contents, including in-class lectures and other instructional materials, are copyrighted. Any type of recording of class sessions by students is prohibited except as part of an accommodation approved by me through the Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services. Online lecture recordings, if pertinent, may not be distributed. Non-politically correct satire is often exhibited within popular culture discourse so, therefore, be warned not to take this class if you are offended by explicit depiction and intellectual discussion regarding sexuality, politics, and religion. Students need a non-judgmental mature mind as class images/videos will depict highly explicit verbal and/or visual subject matter.
**Academic Honesty:** Students need to meet the highest standards of academic honesty. Not doing so will result in penalties ranging from a failing grade on assignments to a failing grade or grade of “XE” in this course. Contact me immediately if you are not sure whether what you are doing is plagiarism and I will help you. You can learn about what constitutes plagiarism at the following website: [http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity](http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity).

**Grading Policies and Percentages:** Grades will be based on equally divided points earned on the following: attendance—20 points and four noncumulative 40 question multiple-choice examinations worth 20 points each. Attending class lectures will serve as your exam study guide as it is here where what you need to know will be emphasized. Monitor your attendance and study habits if you need to maintain a specific Grade Point Average (GPA). Concerns about your course performance should be discussed in person with my Teaching Assistant, if one is assigned to this course, or me. **Do not ask for special favors.** Students who receive unsatisfactory grades should not plead with professors for upgrades as this is unfair to their peers, by requesting preferential treatment, and insults their integrity.

**Grade Point Scale:** (A) 100+-.95, (A-) 94.5-90, (B+) 89.5-87, (B) 86.5-83, (B-) 82.5-80, (C+) 79.5-77, (C) 76.5-70, (D) 69.5-60, (E) 59.5 or less. This scale refers to your CANVAS “Total Points” and Not “Assignment Percentage.”

**Examination Make-Ups:** Alternate test dates/times are not available so plan accordingly as examination make-up dates need to be cleared by me the professor. Only official ASU holidays will be observed.

**Attendance, Tardies, & Examination Make-Ups:** Three absences without verifiable excusal documentation are permitted, on non-examination days, without penalty. At the fourth absence not having proper excusal documentation, **each unexcused absence, that will now also include the first three unexcused absences, will knock your grade down 2.5 points** and can amount to minus points **with each additional unexcused absence.** Four unexcused absences, for example, equal -10 points, five equal -12.5 points, six equal -15 points, etc. **Frequent flowing in and out of class lecture, tardiness, and/or skipping out early will be kept track of and impact your final course grade.** Arriving and/or leaving approximately midway through class will be tallied whereby two occurrences will count as one full absence, **four will count as two full absences, etc.** If, for unforeseen reasons, neither I, the Professor, or my Teaching Assistant, if pertinent, or another ASU representative, such as a Class Grader, is present in class, then, class will be automatically released after twenty minutes have elapsed from the appointed start time. No examination make-up dates will be given without verifiable excusal documentation cleared by me. Only official ASU holidays will be observed.

**Covid-19:** Covid related absence(s) are required to be reported to the Dean of Students. Test and attendance grade point policies might be modified should ASU switch all its in person classes to remote learning. ASU requires all students to wear masks in classrooms. Students violating ASU Covid protocols will be referred to their respective Dean, may not be allowed back in class, and will be docked points on their final attendance score.

**Covid-19 ASU Protocol Update:** As of March 14, 2022, ASU considers it optional for individual students, staff, and faculty to wear masks in classrooms. Any students; however, having, prior to March 14, 2022, violated ASU Covid protocols in REL 202 will be docked final attendance points per the initial syllabus above wording.

**Classroom Behavior:** Disruptive behavior, including ringing cell phones, text messaging, side talking, and reading material not assigned to this course will not be tolerated. Use of **laptops, tablets, and cell phones are prohibited during class lecture and their unauthorized use will impact your final grade, by one full letter grade, unless their use pertains to a Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services accommodation cleared through me. Seating assignments may be required for tracking attendance, as well as excessive tardiness and skipping out of class early (and/or other disruption issues), if students do not follow classroom behavior rules.

**Disability Accommodation:** Students requiring disability accommodations need to make their requests known to me at the beginning of the semester. Verification of eligibility from the Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services is required prior to receiving disability accommodations. Disability information will remain confidential. Students who feel they will need disability accommodations, and have not registered with the Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services, should contact them immediately. The Tempe office is located in the Matthews Center Building and their staff can be reached at: (480) 965-1234 (V) or (480) 965-9000 (TTY). For additional information visit: [https://eoss.asu.edu/accessibility](https://eoss.asu.edu/accessibility).
**Threatening Behavior:** Incidents and/or allegations of violent or threatening conduct by an ASU student (on-or off campus) will be reported to the ASU Police Department and Office of the Dean of Students. If either office determines that the behavior posed, or poses, a threat to personal safety or campus welfare, the student will not be permitted on any ASU campus or in any ASU residence hall until a threat assessment is complete. ASU P.D., the Office of the Dean of Students, and other appropriate offices will coordinate the assessment. Title IX is a federal law providing that no individual be excluded on the basis of sex from participation in, denied benefits from, or be subject to discrimination in any educational activity. Title IX, and ASU policy, makes clear that sexual violence and harassment is prohibited. Individuals who have been subjected to sexual violence or harassed can seek university counseling and academic support. If you, or someone you know, has been harassed or assaulted, please find resource information at [https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs](https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs). I am obligated to report alleged acts of sexual discrimination and sexual and/or dating violence. Counseling Services, [https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling](https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling) are available to confidentially and privately discuss any concerns. Online students may access 360 Life Services, [https://goto.asuonline.asu.edu/success/online-resources.html](https://goto.asuonline.asu.edu/success/online-resources.html).

**Withdrawals and Incomplete Policies:** [https://students.asu.edu/withdrawal](https://students.asu.edu/withdrawal) and [https://students.asu.edu/grades](https://students.asu.edu/grades).

**Disclaimer:** This syllabus is a statement of intent and serves as an agreement between the professor and the student. Every effort will be made to avoid changing the course schedule but the possibility exists that unforeseen events will make syllabus changes necessary. If applicable, your professor will announce any changes.

**Recommendation Letters:** I only write letters of recommendation, at my discretion, for those students who have taken more than one course from me and have scored grades of an A or A+. The previous also applies to taking honors credit with me. Please do not ask if you do not fit this all-important criterion.

> The vast majority of my classmates just sat through four years. They didn’t challenge any authority, take any risks or ask any questions. They just memorized ‘the given,’ not even complaining when instructions turned them into mindless tape-recorders, demanding they recite rather than reason (Newfield 1966:41).

**Course Itinerary and Reading Schedule:**

11 January: Introduction, Class Preview, Attendance, & Watch 1st Part of Film

13 January: Watch 2nd Part of Film

18 January: “Get a Life!”: “Fan” Stems from Fanatic
Read: Carter’s “Star Trek V” on Canvas and “Intro: Guide to Living & Prospering,” “God Needs Compassion,” & “Human Adventure Just Beginning” in *Ultimate Star Trek*

20 January: Unlearn What You Have Learned
Read: “Casuistry in Final Frontier,” “Search of Friendship,” & “Star Trek Philosophy of Peace” in *Ultimate Star Trek* and Malloy’s “Light Side Dark Side” on Canvas

25 January: Time Travel with Megalolomania and Megalopsychia
27 January: Transporting the Animate Force: “Thinking” & “Talking” Things
Read: “Good Day to Die: Transporters,” “Two Kirks,” “Rethinking Matter: Organian Organisms,”
“Personhood: Data is Not a Toaster,” & “Humans, Androids, & Virtual Beings” in Ultimate Star Trek

1 February: The Moral Frontier
& “Enterprise’s Moral Relativism” in Ultimate Star Trek

3 February: Reading Day – No Class

8 February: Exam I (In-Class Only)

10 February: All That Makes Us the True Nature of Reality
Read: “Quest Into Indigenous Space,” “More Complex the Mind,” “Phenomenology and Life World,”
“Life on Holodeck,” & “Which Spock is Real?” in Ultimate Star Trek

15 February: Amok Time
Read: Kelly’s “Chaucer & Cult of Saint Valentine” & Oruch’s “Valentine, Chaucer, & Spring” on Canvas

17 February: Religious Significance of Popular Culture
Read: “Intro: Hidden Plain Site (Pp 1-5/8-11)” & “Entertainment (Skip Ritual Part)” in Altars Where We Worship

22 February: Electronic Umpires?
Read: “Sports (Skip Ritual Part)” & “Science & Technology (Skip Ritual Part)” in Altars Where We Worship

24 February: Pleasure, Eroticism, and Capitalism
Read: “Body & Sex (Skip Myth & Ritual)” & “Big Business (Pp 41-64/Skip Ritual)” in Altars Where We Worship

1 March: The Logic of Lived Religion
Read: “Everyday Religion as Lived” in Lived Religion &
“Politics (Pp 98-112/118 Bottom-129)” in Altars Where We Worship

3 March: Contested Meanings
Read: “Historicizing Sociology of Religion” in Lived Religion & Joyce’s “Ancient Celts” on Canvas

8 — 10 March: Spring Break — No Classes

15 March: Exam II (In-Class Only)

17 March: Celtic Fertility and the Wearing of the Green
Read: MacCana’s “Celtic Mythology,” Joyce’s “Celtic Crisis and Continuation,”
Cronin & Adair’s “St. Patrick’s Day,” & Barth’s “Shamrocks, Harps, & Shillelaghs” on Canvas
22 March: Food, Music, Work, & the Self
Read: “Spirituality and Materiality” & “Gendered Spiritualities” in *Lived Religion*

24 March: Healing and Wholeness
Read: “Embodied Practices” in *Lived Religion*

29 March: Religion as Transformer: Commitment and Hybridity
Read: “Rethinking Religious Identity” in *Lived Religion* & “Beginnings” in *Here Comes the Sun*

31 March: Double Fool On You: Pushing the Boundaries of Good Taste
Read: Wainwright’s “April Fool’s Day,” Williams’ “Playing Games,” Klein’s “Sharing Selfies,” Montemurro’s “Having Sex,” & Waskul’s “Going to the Bathroom” on Canvas

5 April: Same Individual / Different Person
Read: “George Among Savages” & “Price to Pay” in *Here Comes the Sun*

7 April: Music as Education
Read: “Father to Spirit,” “Rebirth,” & “Land of Gods” in *Here Comes the Sun*

12 April: **Exam III (In-Class Only)**

14 April: Celtic Trees, Bunnies, and Eggs
Read: Pennick’s “Celtic Church,” Mile’s “Christmas Tree,” & McCoy’s “Ostara: Rites of Spring” on Canvas

19 April: We Are Just Servants
Read: “Devotees” & “Looking for Krishna” in *Here Comes the Sun*

21 April: My Sweet Lord
Read: “All Things Must Pass” & “Sky Beneath Feet” in *Here Comes the Sun*

26 April: Every Blade of Grass
Read: “Dark Horse” & “Laws of Nature” in *Here Comes the Sun*

28 April: Dazzling and Glorious
Read: Partridge’s “Romanticism” on Canvas and “Preface (ix-xi Top),” “Sacred Ground,” “Going Back,” & “Afterword” in *Here Comes the Sun*

3 May: **Exam IV / Final Exam Period @ 12:10-2:00 pm (In-Class Only)**